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RNAN-48



November 30, 1972

FEDAYEEN: THE RELATIONSHIP WITH EGYPT

Although there are few Palestinians in Egypt, and fewer fedayeen, the relationship between Egypt and the Palestinian resistance movement is an important one for both sides. As the largest and most technologically advanced state in the Arab world, Egypt has traditionally vied for Arab leadership. In this role, Cairo must demonstrate concern for the plight of the disinherited Palestinians. On the other hand, in maneuvering for Arab political and propaganda support, the fedayeen must pay considerable attention to Cairo. In fact, if Egypt had given the fedayeen all-out political support in 1970, the outcome of the battle between the fedayeen and the Government of Jordan might have been quite different.

Today, Egypt is still clinging to the cease-fire, and the harried fedayeen have turned to other Arab capitals for arms, training, and money. The Palestinians who idolized Nasser are bitter at Sadat's cautious policies and prosaic style. Nevertheless, the diplomatic civilities have been preserved, and Egypt is still active in the contest for control of the resistance movement.

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EXEMPT FROM GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION
SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
EXEMPTION CATEGORY 5B (2)

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Ambivalent Egyptian Strategy. The fedayeen-Egyptian relationship is subtle but important. Since the permanent Palestinian population of Egypt is barely 15,000, neither party is in a good position to exert direct influence on the other. However, substantial reciprocal opportunity for indirect leverage resides in the fact that Egypt and the Palestinian people are natural allies against Israel and, at present, the Government of Jordan.

As the stronger party in this alliance, Egypt seeks to call the tune. In Nasser's halcyon days, his name was one to conjure with in Palestinian circles. Instead of dealing through Palestinian leaders, he preferred to talk to the Palestinian masses directly via Cairo Radio. However, after Egypt's defeat in 1967, the Israeli pacification of the occupied territories, and the Jordanian pacification of the East Bank, the Palestinians in these areas drifted beyond Egyptian propaganda range, and Cairo was reduced to dealing with the Palestinian resistance movement. As a military organization, the fedayeen movement is an asset in Egypt's military calculations but a debit in its diplomatic calculations. In reflection of this ambivalence, Egyptian policy toward the Palestinians is a contradictory mix of concessions and controls.

Egyptian Concessions to the Fedayeen

-- Propaganda Support. This kind of support costs Egypt the least. The principal fedayeen radio station, the Voice of Palestine, uses facilities of Cairo Radio. This program has sufficient freedom of action that it was able to excoriate the "reactionary Lebanese authorities" in September 1972. The Black September Organization (BSO) has been known

to use Cairo as a base for issuing its press releases, including the one that proclaimed the kidnappings in Munich. The Egyptian press is sympathetic to the fedayeen; in September 1972 al Ahram highlighted a US press report that US and Israeli intelligence are cooperating against the fedayeen.

-- Support for the Paramilitary Effort. Egypt continues to provide limited amounts of financing and war material to the 'Ayn Jallut Brigade of the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), whose 4,000 men are stationed on the Suez Canal, and to its chosen instrument in the guerrilla movement, Fatah. Although guerrilla training in Egypt was terminated in 1970, there are unconfirmed reports that Egypt has trained a few Palestinians to fly helicopters.

-- Support for Terrorism. There is evidence of Egyptian involvement in the BSO conspiracy to assassinate Jordanian Prime Minister Tal. Egypt's release of the four killers on bail may be relevant to this point. It also appears that Cairo allows the Voice of Palestine to work coded operational messages into its regular programs. The Egyptian Government ascribed the Munich deaths to the German authorities rather than to the kidnappers. However, there is no convincing evidence that Egypt has involved itself in any of the BSO operations other than the Tal assassination.

-- Political Support. In April 1972 Egypt took the position that "the only recognized legitimate representative of the people of Palestine is the legitimate resistance." In its effort to play the role

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of champion of Palestinian rights, Cairo has always provided political support for the fedayeen and often acted as mediator between the fedayeen and Arab host governments. While resisting the fedayeen desire for closure of Egyptian airspace to Jordan's airline, Sadat broke off diplomatic relations with Jordan and reportedly told the press last December he would have nothing more to do with Husayn until Husayn makes his peace with the fedayeen.

While maintaining decorous relations with Lebanon, Cairo has constantly supported the fedayeen effort to preserve that last remaining base. Hence the Cairo agreement of November 1969 and the Beirut agreement of September 1972.

Egyptian Controls on the Fedayeen. Cairo has made a continuing effort to promote the unification of the Palestinian resistance movement under a leader who is amenable to Egyptian discipline. In the 1960's Egypt's chosen instrument was Ahmad Shuqayri. After 1967, Cairo was closely associated with the rise to power of Yasir 'Arafat. By late 1971, the political and military defeats suffered by the resistance had thrown 'Arafat's leadership into question. The best possible index of the current fortunes of the Palestinian resistance is the report that, in their search for the Palestinians' next resistance leader, the Egyptians even have Shuqayri warming up in the bullpen again.

Charting the Egyptian-Fedayeen Relationship. The level of Egyptian support for the resistance movement varies directly with the degree of tension between Egypt and Israel. In the early 1950's, the new

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revolutionary regime in Cairo tolerated a symbolic level of anti-Israel activity by fedayeen in Gaza. In the late 1950's, the Egyptian emphasis was on peace and domestic reconstruction; the fedayeen were sidelined. Then, in the early 1960's, the Israeli program to exploit the waters of the Jordan precipitated a chain of events that led to the 1967 war. Israel's occupation of Gaza and Sinai created an unprecedented level of Egyptian interest in the fedayeen as a dedicated, if not very effective, ally in the "war of attrition."

The cease-fire of August 1970 turned Egypt's attention from military action to diplomatic negotiations. Once again the fedayeen became a drag on Egypt's diplomacy, and restraint dominated Egyptian policy toward the fedayeen. In these circumstances, Cairo's big propaganda guns remained silent while Jordan rolled up the fedayeen movement on its territory.

Unwilling to consign the resistance movement to extinction, Egypt has continued to support the fedayeen's efforts to preserve their last guerrilla base in Lebanon. On the strength of the traditional allegiance that Lebanese Sunni Moslems pay to Cairo, the Egyptian Government was able to persuade the Lebanese Government to sign the 1969 Cairo agreement and the 1972 Beirut agreement. The fact that the newer agreement is much more onerous for the fedayeen presumably does not disturb Cairo, which has publicly deplored the BSO's letter-bombs and which presumably recognizes that the Munich tragedy undercut Sadat's effort to marshal international influence against the Israeli occupation.

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Palestinian Provisional Government? In fact, there are now grounds for speculation that Sadat would like the Palestinians to abandon the military option in favor of international political action. On September 28, he publicly urged the Palestinians to form a provisional government and promised immediate Egyptian recognition. His motives are not yet clear. The Israeli press discerns an effort to torpedo Husayn's plan for a United Arab Kingdom and to prevent Jordan from concluding a separate settlement with Israel. Beirut circles speculate that Sadat has decided that Palestinian terrorism is obstructing his campaign for a negotiated settlement. It must also be noted that, should the exile capital be Cairo, the Palestinians would fall more directly under Egyptian tutelage.

Although Sadat's proposal was bound to be highly contentious, there is no evidence that it was coordinated with the fedayeen leadership. Whether he views it as a serious proposal or a public-relations maneuver, it belongs with the ouster of the Soviet military mission as evidence of a current Egyptian commitment to a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israel dispute.

The fedayeen response. Sadat's proposal fell like a lead balloon among the Palestinian resistance. The anti-Egyptian PFLP openly condemned it. Pro-Egyptian Arafat declined in gentler terms. Arafat is believed to head a moderate faction in Fatah which opposes terrorism and believes that the Arab-Israeli dispute may eventually be solved by negotiation and that the Palestinians must make plans for this contingency. However,

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even the moderates have to pursue a policy of active resistance against Israeli occupation; otherwise, they have no more to offer the average Palestinian than any of the Arab governments. Even if the extremist wing of Fatah should pursue the terrorist option to the point of a final break with the moderates, it seems unlikely that the moderates would accept Sadat's offer to become a tinsel star in the inglorious firmament of the Arab League. If the League should ever decide to recognize the PLO as the legitimate authority on the East Bank as well as the West, perhaps the fedayeen would be more receptive.

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